Galaxy/Spectron Inc

EPA Region 3
Maryland
Cecil County
Elkton

EPA ID# MDD000218008

1st Congressional District

Last Update: December 2002

Other Names: Spectron

Current Site Status

Since the installation of the ground water containment, collection, and treatment system at the Galaxy/Spectron (“Spectron”) site the telltale odor of contaminates leaching into Little Elk Creek is missing. Despite the quietness at the site there is a lot going on behind the scenes. The most obvious is the continued daily operation of the wastewater treatment system which cleans over 40,000 gallons of contaminated groundwater each day. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region III, Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE), and the Galaxy/Spectron Site Waste Generator and Transporter Group II (PRP Group) have been conducting investigations and considering technical alternatives for cleaning up the shallow site soils and the bedrock groundwater. In the near future there should be a recommended remedy for the initial clean-up phase of the contaminated shallow soils, called Operable Unit #1. In addition, sampling of the newly installed bedrock monitoring wells and the possible addition of a few more bedrock wells is continuing as part of the investigation to determine the extent of the contamination. The

bedrock phase of this clean-up remedy will be handled as a separate phase or Operable Unit #2.

Site Description

The Galaxy/Spectron, Inc., ("Spectron") site is comprised of approximately 8 acres and is located just outside of Elkton, Maryland, in a primarily rural area. In 1961, Galaxy Chemicals, Inc., began a solvent recovery operation that treated wastes generated by the electronics, pharmaceutical, paint, and chemical process industries. The site had previously been a paper mill. Galaxy Chemicals went bankrupt in 1975, and the facility was re-opened as Solvent Distillers, Inc., with primarily the same ownership. The company, which changed its name to Spectron, Inc,. in 1978, closed the facility in 1988 and went bankrupt. Over the years, several lagoons were used at the site to dump wastes. Nearby residents repeatedly complained about the odors emanating from the lagoons and a sludge pit. The soil and groundwater are heavily contaminated with predominately chlorinated organic solvents. Little Elk Creek, which runs through the site and was contaminated (including pure product in the sediments) by site activities, is used for recreational fishing. The State designated the creek as a potential drinking water source and a stream targeted for protection and maintenance of its aquatic life. Approximately 5,200 people obtain their drinking water from private wells within four miles of the site. The nearest private wells are within several hundred feet of the site.

Site Responsibility

Cleanup of this site is the responsibility of federal, state, and local governments, and parties potentially responsible for site contamination.

NPL Listing History

This site was proposed to the National Priorities List of the most serious uncontrolled or abandoned hazardous waste sites requiring long term remedial action on October 14, 1992. The site was formally added to the list May 31, 1994, making it eligible for Federal cleanup funds.

Threats and Contaminants

Leachate seeps previously discharging into Little Elk Creek contain elevated levels of chlorinated solvents. The seeps are now being captured and treated on site. Similar contaminants have historically been detected in the creek downstream from the site. The groundwater containment system, installed as part of the current cleanup effort, will cause a significant reduction in these levels. On-site monitoring wells also are contaminated with chlorinated solvents. Potential risks exist if contaminated groundwater is used as a drinking water source. The risks associated with coming into direct contact with contamination seeping from the river bank at the chemical plant location have been eliminated by the installation of the groundwater containment system.

Cleanup Progress

Threat Mitigated by Physical Clean-up Work

When Spectron went bankrupt and ceased operations, approximately 500,000 gallons of flammable liquids were left at the site. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) disposed of these wastes and negotiated an Administrative Order on Consent (AOC) with potentially responsible parties (PRPs) to clean out flammable sludges from the tanks. Another AOC was signed in 1991 requiring over one hundred PRPs (the site has approximately 1,000 PRPs) to control seeps of contaminated groundwater along the west bank of Little Elk Creek. In April 1998, after soliciting input from the community, EPA determined that the best way to control the contamination entering the creek was to install an impermeable liner in the creek adjacent to the chemical plant. A french drain system under the liner captures the contaminated groundwater that would normally enter the creek. The groundwater is being treated by the on-site groundwater treatment system to remove the contamination before the water is discharged to the creek. Construction of the liner started in August 1998 and was completed in April 1999. Native plants were planted along the restored stream banks and in the stream bed, during the late Spring and early Summer of 1999, to help restore natural habitat. An on-site water treatment plant has been constructed and is operating 24 hours a day. The treatment plant processes groundwater captured by the french drain system. Most of the chemical plant has been dismantled by the site owner. Water treatment units have been installed by the

PRPs on several nearby private wells that were slightly contaminated. Semi-annual monitoring of over 20 nearby residential wells is on-going. In 1996, 137 PRPs signed an order with EPA to perform an investigation, called RI/FS which is focusing on the deeper groundwater contamination and the soil contamination at the former chemical plant. EPA will propose cleanup alternatives and recommendations to the public prior to deciding on a clean-up method for the first phase called Operable Unit #1 (OU #1). The formal clean-up decision for OU #1, called a Record of Decision (ROD), should be issued in early 2003.

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The detailed Administrative Record can be examined at the following locations:

Cecil County Library
301 Newark Avenue
Elkton, Maryland

USEPA Region III
1650 Arch Street
Philadelphia, PA 19103
215-814-3157

Please call to schedule an appointment.